

THE LEGACY OF BETHLEHEM

It is that time of the year once more. Fathers and sons are cleaning the yard, mothers and daughters are looking for new curtains and outfits and families are proudly forcing the best looking tree into the car. The business community likes this season. Many hope to see sales soar substantially. A fifty percent increase would be nice, thanks. Amidst the hustle and bustle we are reminded of how it all began many, many years ago. We hear about a human drama that took place in a small corner of the Middle East. A Roman emperor decreed that all individuals should go to the town where they have their roots and get registered. So many mounted their beast of transportation and took to the road. There was this man by the name of Joseph and his pregnant wife, Mary. They left Galilee with destination Bethlehem. Arriving in town they found that all hotels, motels and bed & breakfasts were fully booked. At least, that is what this couple was told. They were offered a place to sleep surrounded by animals. Sometime that night or a night after the first Mary gave birth to a son. The parents called the newborn Jesus. Here is where the human dimension of the drama somewhat fades away and the story goes mystical, transcendental. Here is where human reason retires and faith takes over. Humble shepherds were informed of

this event. They were told that a first had happened in the history of mankind. The destiny of this planet would never more be the same because of this child. And just for the record: the informants were angels from the heavenly realm. Also sophisticated Magi got the news that a special person had come into the world and were guided by a star to the place of birth. Looking back on almost 2000 years of history we can testify to the impact this individual has had on the world. His name is connected to much good but has also been at the center of controversy. Without turning a blind eye on the pain and suffering that humans have inflicted while invoking his name, our focus here is on the value system that formed the cornerstone of the life of this great teacher.

THE STORIES AND THEIR VALUES

In the second part of the Bible, the sacred book of the Christian religion, the story is told of a woman of Samaritan stock going to the well of the patriarch Jacob to draw water around noontime. At this spot she meets Jesus and an interesting dialogue develops. He asks for water and she lets him know that what he is doing is not common. People with his background usually do not associate with people of her ethnicity. He offers her, on a spiritual level, water. This is water that refreshes the soul -the inner

person. The conversation then takes a turn when the teacher reveals a dark page in her life. Amazed by this revelation she puts a theological question to him on where exactly the right place of worship is. He answers her that the place is not that important. It is all about the intentions of the heart. Moved by the goodness of the teacher the lady goes back to her village and invites her people to hear a message of hope by the teacher. Turning the pages of the sacred book the well-known story of the Good Samaritan is found. A man is traveling when he is robbed of his possessions and beaten by a band of thieves who leaves him to die. Two religious leaders pass and see the victim but are not moved to give a helping hand. Along comes a man from Samaria who decides to do something. He looks after the wounds and then takes the victim to an inn where he can get better. All expenses paid by the Samaritan. From biblical days to our present time there have been persons whose lives have been living testimonies of the value system that was handed down from Bethlehem.

Think of Mother Theresa who could have chosen a career in teaching or maybe even acting but instead chose to pursue a career in nunnery and to serve in the slums of the Indian subcontinent.

So when you are having yet another serving of the Christmas bird (for the vegetarians when you are slicing your third round of tofu quiche) just reflect and make a resolution: to adapt a few of those Bethlehem values in the coming year. In future when we are asked to donate a food basket it will not hurt anymore to be separated from our goods but we will cheerfully give moved by a deep-seated love for our fellow man and woman. 

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